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ABSTRACT

In order to determine the relationship between learning and enjoyment, the 99 students enrolled in any of the five basic American Government classes at Oakton Community College during the fall and spring semesters of 1974 were surveyed before and after the course. The pre-test asked for demographic information and data on how each liked to learn and how each believed he/she learned best. The post-test asked for evaluations of the specific learning techniques used during the semester. Results indicated that (1) although only 2 percent indicated on the pre-test that they learned from and enjoyed lectures, lectures were ranked on the post-test as the most effective way of learning (lectures still ranked only third on the list of methods enjoyed, however); (2) although 50 percent indicated on the pre-test that small group discussions were the most enjoyable and efficacious way to learn, such discussions ranked last on the post-test both in terms of material learned and enjoyment; (3) although only 25 percent had assessed medium sized lecture-discussions as the most enjoyable and efficacious, on the post-test these ranked second in terms of learning and first in terms of enjoyment. The conclusion is that early student perceptions of learning and enjoyment may not effectively foretell how successful a particular teaching technique will be. (DC)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING AND ENJOYMENT: A STUDY OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Submitted by:
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October, 1975

OAKTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

JC 760 157

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING AND ENJOYMENT: A STUDY OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING TECHNIQUES

That education should be an enjoyable experience, and that students learn better if they are enjoying the learning process, are certainly not new ideas. Nor is it new to accept the fact that students learn in different ways--that a technique which is most effective for one student will not be effective for another, and may be moderately effective for a third. Further, individual teachers may feel more comfortable with different teaching techniques. In the ideal world of pedagogy students and teachers will be matched not only in their intellectual levels, but also in their optimum learning and teaching situations. That is, the teacher who is most adept at teaching in informal discussions will teach those students who most enjoy and learn best in that situation, while the teacher who delivers stimulating, clear, organized, and witty lectures will teach only those students who form the most appreciative audience. Rarely, however, are these ideal situations present.

Since teaching and learning must occur within the constraints of class size, intellectual abilities, and level of interest and enjoyment, a variety of techniques have been developed to make teaching at least tolerable, if not enjoyable, for teacher and student. Implicit in all these techniques is the assumption that learning and enjoyment go hand in hand. Yet empirically testing this assumption is quite another matter. In addition, some courses are required for various degrees and curricula, and sometimes these required courses are taught with "I have to do this as part of my job" and"I have to take this to get out of here" attitudes

on the part of faculty and students. Certainly American government, a course required by many institutions for a diploma, by many curricula for a major, and by many state agencies for licensing or professional certification, often falls into this category.

In order to test some basic assumptions about the symbiotic relationship between learning and enjoyment and the effect and affect of a variety of teaching techniques, the following research was conducted.

Research Design and Instrumentation

All students enrolled in five basic American government classes taught by a single teacher during the fall and spring semesters of 1974-1975 were surveyed. Each student was asked to complete a questionnaire during the first week of school which included demographic information about the individual, tested their levels of political knowledge and interest, and asked for data about how each liked to learn and how each believed he/she learned best. At the end of the semester each respondent was given a second questionnaire asking for evaluations of specific teaching techniques used during the semester. Parts I and II and the student's final grade in the course were collated to form one questionnaire. While students were assured that their responses would in no way effect their grade (they were told, in fact, that the questionnaire would not even be read until the year was over) the knowledge that their responses were not anonymous may have colored some answers. Nevertheless, this possibility was admitted in order to correlate beginning and end-of-term perceptions about learning and enjoyment. A total of ninety-nine, or 81.8% of the total enrollment of one hundred and twenty-one completed both parts of the questionnaire.

Student Profile

The college at which this study was conducted is a public, two-year institution located in an affluent suburban area outside of Chicago. The two high school districts from which most students come are highly rated, and both have a heavy emphasis on college preparatory courses. One of the high school districts requires American government for graduation; it is an elective in the other district. The college itself requires the course or a United States Constitution examination for a degree if successful completion of a high school constitution test is not certified on the student's transcript. Certification as a public elementary or high school teacher in Illinois also includes American government as a requirement. Thus for many students the course is required.

Fifty-three males and forty-six females completed the questionnaire, with one male and fifteen females being above the age of twenty-four (considered "returning students" by the college). Sixty-six, or two-thirds, did have American government in high school. Table 1 gives the number and percent of students who gave the listed reasons for taking the course in college. Interest in the topic and required course were by far the

TABLE 1

REASONS FOR TAKING AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Reason	Number*	Percent
Interested in topic	62	62.6
Required course	50	50.5
Time course offered	12	12.1
Wanted teacher	6	6.1
Other	9	9.1

*Multiple responses were possible

most frequent responses, with nearly two-thirds of the students giving the former response. Yet when students were asked to estimate their interest in politics a different picture emerges.

Table 2 lists the number and percentage of students expressing various levels of interest in American government or politics. Just under one-third

TABLE 2

LEVELS OF POLITICAL INTEREST

Level of Interest	Number	Percent
Very high	10	10.1
Fairly high	21	21.2
Moderate	50	50.5
Fairly low	14	14.1
Very low	4	4.0
	99	99.9

express very high or fairly high political interest. Half the students express only moderate interest in politics. Thus the group does not seem particularly interested in American politics per se, although it is possible that many students hope the course will enhance their interest in and concern about politics.

In order to determine how much knowledge about American politics students already possessed an index of political knowledge was constructed. Each student was given the name of six prominent political figures and asked to identify each. One point was awarded for each correct answer. Then each student was asked to name three functions of the president and two functions each of Congress and the Supreme Court. One point was

awarded for each correct answer and an additional point was awarded for each complete answer which was correct. Thus, for example, a response for presidential functions such as "signs bills" was awarded one point, while an answer like "signs or vetos bills passed by Congress to indicate approval or rejection" was awarded an additional point. All points were totaled for a maximum score of 20. Scores were then divided into four groups of five points each; Table 3 summarizes the number and percent of students falling into each range on the political knowledge index. One-third of the students fell into the lower half of the range, with 53.5% of them clustering in the category just above the lowest. Only 4% scored in the highest category. While this is a rough test of current political knowledge, the fact that two-thirds of the students had already had American government suggests that little factual information from these courses was retained.

TABLE 3

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE INDEX

Range on Political Knowledge Index	Number	Percent
Lowest range (scored 0-5)	13	13.1
Lower middle range (scored 6-10)	53	53.5
Upper middle range (scored 11-15)	29	29.3
Highest range (scored 16-20)	4	4.0
	99	99.9

Respondents were asked also to list where they get most of their political information and how often they read the newspaper. These results are summarized in Tables 4 and 5. Table 4 indicates that by far the most prevelant source of information is television, with over four-fifths of

TABLE 4

SOURCES OF POLITICAL INFORMATION

Source	Number*	Percent
Television	83	83.8
Newspapers	56	56.6
Magazines	27	27.3
Family	26	26.3
Teachers	24	24.2
Friends	21	21.2
Other	5	5.1

*Multiple responses were possible

the respondents indicating that they used this medium as the major source of their information. Particularly noteworthy is the low percentage of students who rely on their friends for most of their information about politics. While this is congruent with Chaffee, Ward, and Tipton's findings about senior high school students,[2] it contradicts the general assumption that interpersonal communications are the most important means of transmitting political information. The sizeable gap between television and the next most highly rated source--newspapers--suggests that many students rely solely on the television. The three sources of information involving interpersonal communication all were noted by roughly one-quarter of the respondents only, suggesting that some seventy-five percent of the respondents rely on one or more communications media without validating or discussing their information with anyone.

As a final measure of political interest and knowledge students were asked how often they read the newspaper. Responses are summarized

TABLE 5

FREQUENCY OF NEWSPAPER READING

Frequency	Number	Percent
Daily	36	36.7
1-3 times/week	50	51.0
1-2 times/month	2	2.0
Rarely or never	10	10.2
	98	99.9

in Table 5. Just over half the respondents read the paper between one and three times a week; since no data about what parts of the paper are read were collected, however, it is difficult to surmise whether even the fairly regular reader actually spends time on political and current events stories. Since the questions prior to this one on the questionnaire did relate to political interest and knowledge it is plausible to assume that student's responses to this particular item were a reflection of how often they read the political items in the paper.

The picture that emerges of these American government students is one of college-age males and females, many of whom have been exposed to formal courses in American government, who nevertheless do not appear terribly interest in nor knowledgable about the subject. Thus the attempt to evaluate various methods of teaching the subject American government was conducted with a population who knew little about the subject. Even for those who had already had the course in high school, much of the information had either been forgotten or was new.[3]

Teaching Techniques: Student Perceptions of Learning and Enjoyment

Educators often assume that students have some self-perception regarding

how they learn best and how they most enjoy learning. Independent study courses, for example, are obviously geared to those students who prefer to learn at their own pace outside the formal classroom environment. But even within a formal classroom a number of teaching methods can be utilized, and students are credited with knowing what technique is best for them. To assess the students' perceptions about this respondents were asked at the beginning of the semester to indicate which types of classes they enjoyed most and from which they learned most. To focus on a topic such as American government the students were then asked to indicate how they would most like to learn about American government and how they believed they could best do so. Results of this are summarized in Table 6.

Regarding general learning in classes, slightly more than half the respondents view small group discussion as the most enjoyable and efficacious way to learn, and slightly more than one-quarter assess medium size lecture-discussions or experiences and field trips in this way. Only three percent positively evaluate independent study, and only two percent similarly rate lectures. When asked to assess how they would most like to learn about American government and how they could best do so the largest agreement found was for "being told about it," (a lecture by another name); here only 48 percent positively evaluated this method. The next highest ranking--agreed on by 41 percent--was for experiences and field trips. One-quarter indicated that movies or television would be most valuable. Only one-fifth so rated reading. Thus even less agreement upon what would be enjoyable and efficacious methods of learning for American government was evidenced than for learning in general.

The lack of consensus among students regarding what methods of teaching are most enjoyable and most effective suggests that, even if students had

TABLE 6

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING AND ENJOYMENT

BY SELECTED TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Method of Learning in General	Number*	Percent
Small group discussion	53	53.5
Medium size lecture-discussion	27	27.3
Experiences and field trips	27	27.3
Independent study	3	3.0
Large lectures	2	2.0
Method of Learning American Government		
Being told about it	43	43.4
Experiences and field trips	41	41.4
Movies and Television	26	26.3
Reading	21	21.2

*Multiple responses were possible

complete information about how a course was to be taught, and even if they had a choice as to what course and teaching technique to select, a large percentage of students would not be able to make a choice based on clear preferences.

Teaching Techniques: Student Evaluations

During the course of the semester a concerted attempt was made by the instructor to utilize a variety of teaching techniques so that students would have some comparative experiences to draw upon in determining which techniques they enjoyed most and which techniques they felt were most effective. At the end of the term students evaluated these techniques and also gave some general information about their own investment in the

class. Results of these and other data collected about the students at the beginning of the term were analyzed to see whether students receiving each possible grade in the course differed along any of the variables. A one-way analysis of variance was performed to determine whether such differences were significant. The results of this are listed in Table 7.[4]

TABLE 7

FINAL GRADE IN COURSE BY

STUDENT VARIATIONS ON SELECTED MEASURES

Variable	F-score	Significance*
Number of college credits earned	0.7011	None
High school rank	8.116	.01
Grade in high school American government	5.473	.01
Political interest	2.252	None
Frequency of newspaper reading	1.411	None
Political knowledge index	11.392	.01
Number of times attend course	8.688	.01
Amount of assigned reading completed	4.499	.01

*Levels of significance higher than .05 were considered insignificant

Those variables which reflect prior academic performance (high school rank and grade in high school American government) are related to the final grade in the course. Of those measures reflecting general political knowledge and interest (political interest, frequency of newspaper reading, and political knowledge per se), only the political knowledge index is significantly related to the final course grade. The two measures of investment in the course itself (number of times attended and amount of assigned reading completed) are significantly

related to the final grade. This suggests that prior knowledge and interest are not as important to the grade in American government than current investment in the course, and that traditional measures of academic performace (high school rank and previous grades) are also better predictors of current academic performance than interest in the subject per se. Also related to students' final grades was whether American government had been taken in high school. The mean grade for those who had American government was 2.56 (A = 4), while for those who had not had it, mean grade was 2.88; this is a significant difference ($p = < .01$). This difference was also a suprise, since it was expected that students who had previously had the course would do better than those who had not. It further underlines the lack of relationship between high school American government and the corresponding course in college.

At the end of the course students were asked to rate specific teaching techniques along two five-point dimensions: how much they enjoyed each method and how much they learned from each. A score of 1 denoted the most positive evaluation and a score of 5, the most negative. The mean score of each technique appears in Table 8. Lecture was viewed as the most effective way of learning, although it ranked only third in terms of enjoyment. This is in marked contrast to the extremely low percentage of students (2 percent) who claimed to both enjoy and learn from lectures at the beginning of the semester, although the 43 percent who said they would learn and enjoy being "told about" American government might indicate that a lecture by another name is more acceptable to students. Student discussions, expected to rank highly given the early high rating attached to informal discussions, ranked last both in terms of material learned and enjoyment. Class rap sessions, which were instructor-led, faired much better. While these findings may be a function of the particular

class and student composition, they suggest that early student perceptions of learning and enjoyment may not effectively fortell how successful a particular teaching technique or class will be.

TABLE 8

STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF LEARNING AND ENJOYMENT OF SELECTED TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Teaching technique	Learning			Enjoyment		
	Rank	Mean	S.D.	Rank	Mean	S.D.
Lectures	1	1.667*	0.670	3	1.919	0.791
Student discussions	5	2.685	1.114	5	2.461	1.119
Movies	4	1.979	0.870	2	1.804	0.886
Class rap sessions	2	1.765	0.883	1	1.755	0.931
Discussion readings	3	1.928	0.881	4	2.216	0.971
Overall evaluation		1.701	0.695		1.816	0.737

*The lower the mean score, the more positive was the evaluation

Finally, an attempt was made to determine if student perceptions of learning and enjoyment were correlated; that is, to see whether a student who evaluated a particular technique as particularly effective also enjoyed that technique and vice versa. It was expected that in some cases, particularly lectures, students would perceive a technique as effective for learning but not for enjoyment; it was also expected that the general desire of students for class discussions and rap sessions would be evidenced in a higher level of enjoyment than learning. Table 9 summarizes the results of these and several other product-moment correlations. The correlation between learning and enjoyment is evident in the table, with each correlation being significant at the level of .001 (meaning that only in 1 in 1000 chances would this particular

TABLE 9

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SELECTED VARIABLES

Variables	r	Level of significance
Grade expect and final grade in course	.8153	.001
Enjoy lectures and learn from lectures	.6223	.001
Enjoy student discussions and learn from student discussions	.7834	.001
Enjoy movies and learn from movies	.6494	.001
Enjoy class rap sessions and learn from class rap sessions	.8322	.001
Enjoy discussing readings and learn from discussing readings	.7128	.001
Enjoy overall and learn overall	.7927	.001
Enjoy overall and final grade	.3547	.001
Learn overall and final grade	.3303	.001

correlation be found by random chance). Absolute levels of correlation are fairly sizeable except in the case of overall class evaluations and final grades. While students accurately assessed the grade they would receive in the course (first entry in the table), their perception of their overall learning and enjoyment did not relate highly to their final grade. Interestingly, the assessment of overall learning and enjoyment did correlate fairly strongly (r = .7927) with each other.

Finally, student perceptions regarding what they would most learn from and enjoy at the beginning of the term were compared to their assessments of the same technique at the end of the term. Since the only method receiving substantial support for both learning and enjoyment was small group discussions this method was selected for analysis. During the course of the semester two teaching techniques were used which could

be considered variants of small group discussions: class rap sessions, during which assigned material as well as general politics were discussed; and small student discussion groups, during which groups of students discussed specific course-related topics. The mean evaluation given each of these techniques on both the learning and enjoyment dimensions was compared for those who had indicated they learned from or enjoyed this method and for those who had not so indicated. The results of this are summarized in Table 10. What is immediately apparent here is that respondents differentiated between class rap sessions and small student discussion groups, with the latter markedly lower on mean evaluation scores for both learning and enjoyment. Mean scores are significantly different ($p < .01$) on the evaluation means for how much was learned from student discussion groups between students who initially responded favorably or neutrally to this technique, and they are similarly different ($p < .01$) on the means for evaluation of enjoyment for class rap sessions. This implies that there may be some propensity of students to evaluate more favorably those techniques they looked upon favorably to begin with, but the lack of significant differences for the other two measurements (how much was learned from class rap sessions and how much enjoyment was derived from student discussion groups) suggests further research in this area is needed.

As an additional method of collecting information about learning and enjoyment from students, the following open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire completed at the end of the semester:

1. What did you enjoy most about this class?
2. What did you enjoy least about this class?
3. How did you learn best in this class?
4. How did you learn least in this class?

TABLE 10

MEAN EVALUATIONS OF STUDENT DISCUSSION GROUPS

BY INITIAL STUDENT PERCEPTION

Initial Student Perception	End of Semester Evaluation
Learn best from small group discussion	Learn from student discussion groups*
Yes	2.52
No	2.97
	Learn from class rap sessions
Yes	1.70
No	1.87
Enjoy small group discussions	Enjoy student discussion groups
Yes	2.79
No	2.75
	Enjoy class rap sessions*
Yes	1.36
No	2.02

* $p = < .01$

Student responses to these questions were quite numerous. Sample responses include the following:

What did you enjoy most about this class?

"Rap sessions in class, thus enabling me to become more politically involved and aware of political arena and especially at this time when the political arena is so interesting."

"I enjoyed the lectures the most; I thought they were very informative. I thought it was interesting that the instructor added her personal experience into the discussion."

What did you enjoy least about this class?

"The lectures, but I cannot think of any alternative way of teaching and getting the same information."

"The readings seemed too wordy. There was a lot of information yet the book didn't present the material in the best way."

"Complicated - too much to absorb in short period of time. As and adult, I had to cast out previous conceptions and relearn."

"I hate lectures."

How did you learn best in this class?

"I felt I learned the most from lectures. There is so much to learn. I feel that listening to someone who has studied the subject and has made this their lifetime work and interest is much more valuable than the opinions of those who have not had the benefit of this knowledge and experience."

"From listening to class discussions; everyone asked so many questions and I remembered the answers."

"I learned best in the class from the lectures and the discuwsion when the teacher was in on the discussion."

How did you learn least in this class?

"By not discussing what we had read in the book. Also if quizzes were given on some of the areas in the book it would help."

"From reading the assigned book. I hated the book."

"By listening to other people."

"A straight lecture where you talk and we take notes on what you say."

Discussion of findings

It appears evident from this research that individual students do have perceptions about how they best learn and what types of courses they most enjoy, but there is little consensus among students about this. Clearly lectures and independent study rate poorly among students in this population; preference seems to be given to those learning situations in which discussions can be held. Yet the end of semester evaluations of the various teaching techniques present mixed evidence regarding how students actually do learn best and what situations they most enjoy. Lectures and

class rap sessions were the most successful techniques for both learning and enjoyment, although movies were also rated favorably for enjoyment. Situations in which the teacher was not included (student discussion groups and reading) rated more poorly than situations in which the teacher was directly involved. This may be due to students' lack of confidence in their own abilities--they may doubt they can do the work without guidance--or their lack of discipline or maturity in acting on their own.

The high correlations between ratings for learning and enjoyment on each item imply that for the most part learning and enjoyment do go together, at least in the students' own perceptions. Students may have mixed opinions about what techniques are most successful for them at the beginning of the semester, but at the end of a class they do appear to associate learning with enjoyment.

The lack of consensus among students regarding preferred teaching techniques suggests that ideally a mixed bag of techniques will be offered, if not within a single class, at least between classes for the same course. The high evaluation of lectures at the end of the course, finally, suggest that despite the general negative view of lectures held by many, they do have their place and many students will still learn from and enjoy them.

ENDNOTES

1 Langton and Jennings found that even the high school civics curriculum added little to the political knowledge and orientations or middle-class white students. See Kenneth P. Langton and M. Kent Jennings, "Political Socialization and the High School Civics Curriculum," American Political Science Review, LXII (September, 1968), 852-867.

2 They cons tructed an index to determine the sources used by senior high school students for most of their political information. Students were presented with four options: the mass media, teachers, parents, and friends. The first was far a away the most utilized source. See Steven H. Chaffee, L. Scott Ward, and Leonard P. Tipton, "Mass Communication and Political Socialization" in Jack Dennis (ed.), Socialization to Politics. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1973), pp. 391-409.

3 Class attendance was not mandatory, but students were urged to attend.

4 Complete tables describing the relationship between grades and selected variables are in the Appendix.

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APPENDIX

MEAN GRADE POINT AVERAGE BY SELECTED VARIABLES

	Mean	Number
Number College Credits Earned		
0-15	2.094	32
16-30	2.250	20
31-45	2.739	23
46-60	2.600	5
61 and above	2.500	2
High School Rank		
First quarter	3.467	15
Second quarter	2.469	32
Third quarter	1.524	21
Fourth quarter	3.000	4
High School American Government Grade		
A	3.571	7
B	2.433	30
C	1.579	19
F	3.000	1
Political Interest		
Very high	2.900	10
Fairly high	2.905	21
Moderate	2.120	50
Fairly low	1.714	14
Very low	2.500	4

	Mean	Number
Frequency of Newspaper Reading		
Daily	2.611	36
2-3 times/week	1.917	24
1-2 times/week	2.308	26
1-2 times/month	3.500	2
Rarely or never	1.900	10
Political Knowledge Index		
Lowest range	.846	13
Lower middle range	2.170	53
Upper middle range	3.069	29
Highest range	3.750	4
Number of Times Attend Course		
All or almost all	2.755	53
75-90%	2.250	32
50-75%	1.000	13
25-50%	No credit	1
Amount of Assigned Reading Completed		
All or almost all	2.760	50
75-90%	1.964	28
50-75%	1.571	14
25-50%	.667	3
Below 25%	3.250	4